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ABSTRACT

Introducing preschool-age children to people of diverse ethnic/racial backgrounds and cultural practices is becoming one of the central features of early educational programming. This study used a pre-test post-test design with a control to assess such an educational intervention aimed at positively influencing American preschoolers' attitudes toward Japanese children. American children's ethnic/racial awareness and attitudes were assessed using multiple measures prior to and after the completion of a 4-month-long cultural exchange program between a preschool in the United States and one in Japan. In comparison to the control group, children participating in the "Sister School" program showed an increase in ethnic/racial awareness and own-group bias after the program's completion. However, children's own-group bias was not related to their evaluation of Japanese children when attitudes toward Japanese were assessed independently of the children's attitudes toward their own group. Thus, while the treatment group children displayed a significant increase in own-group bias on a forced-choice attitude assessment, their evaluation of Japanese on an independent measure was slightly more favorable after the intervention than before; however, this increase on the independent measure did not achieve significance. These finding suggest three important points: (1) teaching preschool-age children about an ethnic/racial out-group raises their awareness of their own group membership; (2) increasing children's investment in their own ethnic/racial group does not automatically translate into their disparagement of out-groups; and (3) preschool-age children's out-group attitudes are not easily influenced. (Contains 41 references.) (Author)

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Vicarious Exposure to Diversity as a Means of Influencing Young Children's Ethnic/Racial Attitudes

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Abstract

A pre-test post-test design with a control was used to assess an educational intervention aimed at positively influencing American preschooler's attitudes toward Japanese children. American children's ethnic/racial awareness and attitudes were assessed using multiple measures prior to and after the completion of a four month long cultural exchange program between a preschool in the United States and one in Japan. In comparison to the control group, children participating in the "Sister School" program showed an increase in ethnic/racial awareness and own-group bias after the program's completion. However, children's own-group bias was not related to their evaluation of Japanese when attitudes toward Japanese were assessed independently of the children's attitudes toward their own group. Thus, while the treatment group children displayed a significant increase in own-group bias on a forced-choice attitude assessment, their evaluation of Japanese on an independent measure was slightly more favorable after the intervention than before; however, this increase on the independent measure did not achieve significance. These findings suggest three important points: (1) teaching presschool-age children about an ethnic/racial out-group raises their awareness of their own group membership, (2) increasing children's investment in their own ethnic/racial group does not automatically translate into their disparagement of out-groups, and (3) preschool-age children's out-group attitudes are not easily influenced.

Introducing preschool-age children to people of diverse ethnic/racial backgrounds and cultural practices is becoming one of the central features of early educational programing (e.g., Derman-Sparks, 1992; Koeppel & Mulrooney, 1992; McCracken, 1993; Morris, 1983; Neugebauer, 1992). Many current approaches to preschool curriculum aim to redress past biases by making images of diversity part of children's everyday experience; as such, these programs may be of immense psychological importance to children from previously underepresented groups. In addition to validating all children's ethnic/racial goup membership within the educational setting, implict in many of these approaches is the further hope that teaching young children about diverse peoples will engender in them positive attitudes towards members of ethnic/racial groups other than their own and thus prepare them to live harmoniously in an increasingly diverse world. While fostering inclusive atttitudes among children is clearly a laudable goal, outside of anedotal reports there has been little systematic attempt to demonstrate the effectiveness of these programs for shaping preschool-age children's attitudes toward ethnic/racial out-groups (i.e., groups of which they are not members).

Of the relatively few studies that have examined the modification of preschoolers' ethnic/racial attitudes, most have investigated highly structured experimental interventions rather than more broadly based educational programming. For example, some experimental studies (Elliot & Tyson, 1983; Williams & Edwards, 1969) have successfully used mild punishment and positive reinforcement, administered during individual interview sessions, to condition preschool-age children into favorably evaluating the color black. These studies further demonstrated that the conditioned tendency to positively evaluate the color black generalized to the evaluation of Black people as assessed by forced-choice attitude measures. Other studies

(Parish, 1974; Parish & Fleetwood, 1975; Parish, Fleetwood & Lentz, 1975) have had mixed success trying to obtain similar results by conditioning kindergarten children's attitudes toward the color black using classical conditioning (i.e., the repeated pairing of either positive or neutral words with the color black). While these unusual experimental procedures have met with some success in influencing young children's ethnic/racial attitudes, their reliance on highly structured conditioning paradigms makes them quite different from the kinds of curricular approaches presently advocated by early childhood educators (see Bredekamp, 1986). Other than the initial evaluation of Sesame Street which suggested that viewers were more positive toward members of various ethnic/racial groups than nonviewers (Bogatz & Ball, 1971), little has been done to investigate the impact of educational programs that vicariously introduce preschool-age children to members of ethnic/racial groups other than their own.

The paucity of research investigating the effectiveness of educational programs aimed at shaping preschool-age children's emerging ethnic/racial attitudes is made more troubling by recent theoretical speculation suggesting that this may be a particularly difficult task. A number of researches have suggested that young children's ethnic/racial out-group attitudes are strongly influenced by developmental limitations present in the children's emerging cognitive abilities (Aboud & Doyle, 1993; Aboud & Skerry, 1984; Doyle, Beaudet & Aboud, 1988; Katz, 1983; Ramesy, 1987). For example, there is evidence that young children have a tendency to be overly impressed by observable physical characteristics and also find it difficult to understand perspectives other than their own (DeVries, 1969; Flavell, 1985; Piaget & Inhelder, 1956). Limitations such as these are thought to cause preschool-age children to mentally represent ethnic/racial out-groups in distorted and highly stereotypic ways that lead the children to adopt

negative attitudes toward these groups. Since according to this view, the children's ethnic/racial attitudes are an outgrowth of basic psychological processes characteristic of their developmental level, some researchers have speculated that curricular interventions aimed at influencing these emergent attitudes may be largely ineffective (Aboud & Doyle, 1993; Bigler & Liben, 1993). What is more, following this line of reasoning, it is possible that highlighting ethnic/racial group membership at this early age may have the unintended effect of fueling preschool-age children's already exiting tendency to magnify between group differences and develop negative stereotypes. If this is indeed the case, then it might be wise to wait until a time when children are more capable of accurately incorporating information about group differences into their world view before actively teaching them about ethnicity and race. Developmentally, it could be argued that a logical time to start such teaching might be at the age of 6 or 7 when children begin displaying the cognitive changes traditionally associated with the transition from preoperational to concrete operational thought, and studies of children's ethnic/racial attitudes report a marked decline in children's negative out-group evaluations (Aboud & Skerry, 1984; Black-Gutman & Hickson, 1996; Doyle et al., 1988; Powlishta, Serbin, Doyle & White, 1994). Additional support for the effectiveness of implementing curricular interventions at this time comes from studies indicating that audiovisual media (Houser, 1978), multiethnic readers (Litcher & Johnson, 1969), and multi-factor curricular interventions (Singh & Yancey, 1974) are successful at influencing the ethnic/racial attitudes of children at this age, as are more structured experimental procedures (Katz, 1973; Katz & Zalk, 1978).

The absence of empirical findings concerning the effectiveness of educational programs aimed at shaping preschool-age children's ethnic/racial attitudes, coupled with the current

popularity of such programs, their socially important mission, and recent theoretical speculation suggesting they may be largely ineffective, or perhaps worst, counter-productive, indicates a strong need to further investigate the impact of these curricular interventions on children's emerging ethnic/racial attitudes. The present exploratory study addresses this need and adds to our understanding of the relationship between early childhood programing and children's ethnic/racial attitudes by investigating the effect of one type of early intervention, indirect interethnic contact, on preschool-age children's emerging ethnic/racial attitudes. This was accomplished by investigating the effectiveness of an educational intervention aimed at influencing American preschoolers' attitudes toward the ethnic/racial out-group Japanese.

Children participating in the study had their awareness of ethnic/racial categories and their attitudes toward Japanese assessed prior to and after the completion of a four month long cultural exchange program between a preschool in the Southwest United States and one in Chikugo City Japan. This intervention was modeled after Koeppel and Mulrooney's (1992) "Sister School" program and during its four month duration teachers intermittently talked with the children about "their sister school friends in Japan" and engaged them in numerous activities related to the cultural exchange. These activities included periodically viewing a video tape of the Japanese children and their school, and making a similar video tape of their own and sending it to Japan. The participants in the program also wrote group letters to their "Japanese friends", exchanged artwork with them, read books about Japan, and held a one day "Matsuri" (i.e., Japanese festival). These activities were more numerous at the introduction of the program (at least one a week for the first four weeks) and then tapered off to approximately three a month until the project ended.

Method

Procedure

The intervention was assessed using a pre-test, post-test design with a control. Post intervention testing began 10 days after the completion of the program and continued for three weeks. Data was collected from 30 ethnically and socioeconomically diverse children (12 girls, 18 boys) enrolled in a university-based preschool program (mean age, 4 years-7 months) Of the 30 children, 18 attended a morning class that participated in the cultural exchange program, while 12 attended an afternoon class that did not participate in the program and served as a control. Children from both groups were assessed during pre and post intervention individual interview sessions using the following measures.

Measures

Ethnic/racial awareness. A composite measure of each child's performance on a series of tasks assessing their ability to sort photographs by the physical cues associated with ethnic/racial group membership, correctly identify members of different ethnic/racial groups, and correctly identify their own ethnic/racial group membership (possible range of scores: 0 - 10).

Forced-choice attitude. A forced-choice attitude assessment modeled after the Preschool Racial Attitude Measure II (Williams, Best, Boswell, Mattson & Graves, 1975), that required each child to assign 7 positive and 7 negative adjectives to individual dolls presented in pairs and representing the child's own ethnic/racial group and the target group Japanese. The child received one point each time they assigned a positive adjective to the target group Japanese, and one point each time they *chose not to* assign a negative adjective to the target group when given the chance (possible range 0-14). Since the measure forces the child to chose between the target

group and their own group, high scores may be interpreted as suggesting a positive evaluation of the target group Japanese relative to one's own group.

Free-choice attitude. This measure assessed each child's attitude toward the target group independent of their attitude toward their own group. In contrast to the forced-choice measure, each child was now free to either assign or not assign 7 positive and 7 negative adjectives to an individually presented doll representing a Japanese child. The child received one point for each positive adjective assigned to the target and one point for each negative adjective not assigned. High scores suggest a positive evaluation of the target group Japanese (possible range 0-14).

Group Preference. A forced-choice measure adapted from the Katz and Zalk (1978) friendship questionnaire that required each child to choose play partners from an array of three ethnically diverse dolls in response to a series of suggested activities (e.g., "Who would you like to sit next to during snack?"). The three choices always represented the child's ethnic/racial group, Japanese, and one other ethnic/racial out-group that varied according to the child's ethnicity. The child received one point each time they selected their own group. Thus, high scores suggest own-group bias (possible range 0 - 5).

Results and Discussion

Between group differences on the above four measures were analyzed using a doubly-multivariate repeated measures analysis of variance. The analysis failed to reveal a significant multivariate effect for group, Wilks' lambda = .807, $F(4, 25) = 1.49$; $p < .23$ or time, Wilks' lambda = .743, $F(4, 25) = 2.17$; $p < .10$. However, it did reveal a significant multivariate group by time interaction, Wilks' Lambda = .661, $F(4,25) = 3.21$; $p < .03$. Post hoc univariate analysis showed the source of the interaction to be a significant group by time interaction for the forced-

choice attitude scores $F(1, 28) = 10.33$; $p < .003$. Treatment group children's post intervention scores on the forced-choice attitude measure ($M = 2.11$) were actually lower than their pre intervention scores ($M = 4.61$), $t(56) = 2.46$, $p < .017$; while the control group children's post intervention scores ($M = 6.00$) were higher than their pre intervention scores ($M = 3.33$), $t(56) = -2.14$, $p < .037$ (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here

At first glance, the above results seem to suggest the intervention had the opposite of the intended effect. That is, treatment group children's positive regard for Japanese, as assessed by the forced-choice attitude measure, actually went down as a result of the intervention rather than up. While this somewhat disconcerting finding might be interpreted as support for the view that highlighting ethnic/racial group membership for cognitively immature preschoolers fuels their already existing tendency to represent out-groups in negative ways, a closer examination of the forced-choice attitude measure suggest an alternative conclusion. It is important to note that the forced-choice attitude assessment required children to chose between their own group and Japanese when assigning positive and negative adjectives. This type of forced-choice procedure confounds children's in-group and out-group evaluations and previous research suggests these measures are better characterized as indicators of in-group bias rather than out-group attitudes (Kowalski, 1996). Taking this into account, it is more accurate to interpret the post intervention decline in the forced-choice assessment of Japanese as an indicator of an increase in treatment group children's positive own group evaluations, or in-group bias, rather than as a decrease in

their positive regard for Japanese. This interpretation of the data is supported by the reverse (though nonsignificant) pattern of findings on the free-choice attitude measure (i.e., the treatment group's post intervention positive evaluations of Japanese on the free-choice measure increased while the control group's scores decreased; see Table 1). A post intervention increase in treatment group children's in-group bias is further suggested by the movement (though nonsignificant) in that direction on the group preference measure.

The above findings suggest that as a result of the intervention, treatment group children's positive regard for Japanese may have increased slightly as suggested by the change in that direction on the free-choice attitude measure. However, a more prominent effect of the cultural exchange program on these children appears to have been an increase in their investment in their own group, as indicated by the rise in treatment group children's in-group bias as assessed by the forced-choice measures (i.e., forced-choice attitude and group preference). While post hoc analysis of univariate time effects should be interpreted with caution because the multivariate effect for time only approached significance, an examination of the children's ethnic/racial awareness scores is useful for understanding the post intervention increase in treatment group children's in-group bias. Analysis of simple effects indicated the treatment group's post intervention ethnic/racial awareness scores were higher than their pre intervention level, $t(56) = -2.3$, $p < .025$, while the difference between the control group's scores (although in the same direction) did not achieve significance $t(56) = -1.53$, $p = .13$. This change in ethnic/racial awareness scores suggest the intervention raised the treatment group children's level of ethnic/racial awareness and along with it the amount of in-group bias they displayed on the forced-choice measures. This interpretation of the increase in in-group bias is supported by

previous findings (Kowalski, 1995) demonstrating a moderate correlation ($r = .30$, $p < .01$) between preschool-age children's in-group bias and their scores on the ethnic/racial awareness measure.

While the generalizability of the present study is limited by the sample size, the absence of random assignment to conditions, and the unique characteristics of social context that influence all educational interventions, the results do suggest several important points. First, the rise in treatment group children's post intervention ethnic/racial awareness scores suggests that teaching preschoolers about a specific ethnic/racial out-group is likely to raise their awareness of their own ethnic/racial group membership as well. Previous research indicates that between the ages of 3 to 5, children start learning to identify their ethnic/racial group membership (Aboud, 1987; Ocampo, Bernal & Knight, 1993). Therefore, it seems likely that teaching them about ethnic/racial diversity during this critical time period accelerates this process. Second, the present findings as well as numerous other studies indicate that once children are aware of their ethnic/racial group membership, they often show a preference for that group if (all other factors being equal) they are forced to chose between that group and an ethnic/racial out-group (e.g., Aboud & Doyle 1993; Kowalski, 1996; Ramesy & Myers, 1990). While this tendency toward own-group bias appears more pronounced in European-American children, it has been demonstrated in other groups as well, sometimes emerging at a slightly older age (for a review see Aboud & Skerry, 1984). Third, showing a preference for one's own group does not necessarily translate into the disparagement of out-groups. This is indicated by the disjunction between the children's attitudes toward Japanese as independently assessed on the free-choice measure and their level of in-group bias as assessed by the forced-choice measures. While both

treatment and control group children displayed in-group bias on the forced-choice attitude measure, their attitudes toward Japanese as assessed by the free choice measure were generally positive both prior to and after the intervention (all mean scores > 10.0; see Table 1). This cleavage between young children's preference for their own group when forced to chose between it and an ethnic/racial out-group, and their positive regard for that same out-group when it is assessed independently, has been previously reported and appears to be an important feature of children's emerging ethnic/racial attitudes (Kowalski, 1996; Williams, Williams & Beck, 1973).

While participation in the four month long cultural exchange program was accompanied by a slight rise in treatment group children's positive evaluations of Japanese on the free-choice measure, this increase was not significant suggesting the program had little initial influence on the children's emerging out-group attitudes. This lack of influence may be due to the previously discussed cognitive limitations that likely make it difficult for preschool-age children to accurately incorporate information about ethnic/racial out-groups into their world view. This interpretation of the results is supported by the fact that even after participating in the four month long cultural exchange, treatment group children almost never mentioned the "Sister School" program during the post intervention testing, and when queried by the interviewer at the end of the session, these children often confused the category Japanese with Chinese and maintained that they had never had any contact with Japanese children. The above findings suggest that preschool-age children's early school experiences may not be as formative as some had hoped in determining their long term ethnic/racial out-group attitudes and that these attitudes likely come into being over an extended period of time. This proposed protracted period of learning leaves open the admittedly speculative possibility that while the immediate effect of the program on the

children's attitudes toward Japanese was nonsignificant, this early experience may have served to inoculate these children from developing negative attitudes toward this group in the future (Katz, 1976). In contrast to what appears to be the gradual development of out-group attitudes, the children's positive own group evaluations seemed to emerge relatively quickly in conjunction with learning their own ethnic/racial group membership. This apparent difference in the pattern of early acquisition suggests children's in-group and out-group attitudes may be initially rooted in different psychological processes, with in-group attitudes more closely linked to the children's need for positive self regard.

It should be noted that while the present study was limited to assessing the interventions short term effectiveness at influencing children's out-group attitudes, the goals of the Sister School program itself were not as circumscribed. Post intervention interviews with the teachers who implemented the program indicated that, while they were clearly uncertain of its effects on the children's attitudes toward Japanese, they never the less felt it was successful on other fronts. Those most often mentioned had to do with holding the children's interest over a sustained period of time, presenting them with enjoyable experiences, and providing an authentic context for addressing other topics such as literacy and social studies (e.g., letter writing and learning about the postal system).

In summary, the findings suggest teaching preschool-age children about ethnic/racial out-groups likely raises their awareness of their own group membership as well. Further, this heightened awareness of their own ethnic/racial group membership can lead to in-group bias if the children are forced to chose between their own group and an ethnic/racial out-group. Considering this tendency toward in-group bias, it may be prudent when working with preschool-

age children to make certain that information about ethnic/racial out-groups is presented in conjunction with clear messages as to their value and the unacceptability of prejudice and discrimination (for practical ways of doing this see Derman-Sparks, 1989). However, it is also important to note that this in-group bias does not automatically translate into negative out-group attitudes in young children and may even be taken as an indicator of psychological well being (1). Thus, it may be argued that when accompanied by clear messages as to the value of diversity, teaching preschool-age children about other ethnic/racial groups has the additional psychological benefit of helping them discover more about themselves.

The above interpretation of the interventions impact was made possible by examining multiple indicators of children's ethnic/racial attitudes. The use of multiple indicators in gaging the effectiveness of programs aimed at influencing children's ethnic/racial attitudes is crucial because as previously noted by Katz et al. (1975, 1978) there is often little correlation between these multiple measures suggesting they tap different aspects of what appears to be a complex multidimensional phenomena. In order to reveal this complexity it is important that the relationship between preschool curriculum and children's ethnic/racial awareness and attitudes be investigated from multiple perspectives using multiple methodologies. The present study contributes to this investigation by offering up one of these perspectives. Clearly others are needed, including those utilizing more qualitative methods of inquiry, if we are to understand more fully the relationship between early educational programing and children's emerging ethnic/racial attitudes.

Notes

1. One aspect of the original Clark and Clark (1939, 1947) doll studies that made them persuasive as evidence in the Supreme Court case that helped end forced racial segregation, was that there was something intuitively troubling about the fact that the young African-American children they interviewed often showed a preference for White dolls over Black. However, more recently Banks (1976) has questioned whether the in-group bias characteristically associated with young European-American children should be accepted as the normative standard of psychological adjustment. This raises the possibility that a pattern of neutrality with respect to ethnic/racial choices, more often reported in young minority children, may be more adaptive.

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Table 1

Pre and Post Intervention Mean Scores and Standard Errors by Group For Forced-Choice Attitude, Free-Choice Attitude, Group Preference and Ethnic/Racial Awareness

		Treatment		Control	
Measure	Time	M	SE	M	SE
Forced-Choice	Pre	4.61*	1.03	3.33*	1.27
Attitude	Post	2.11*	0.87	6.00*	1.06
Free-Choice	Pre	10.33	0.83	12.33	1.02
Attitude	Post	11.11	0.79	11.42	0.97
Group	Pre	2.83	0.45	3.08	0.55
Preference	Post	3.28	0.45	2.75	0.55
Ethnic/Racial	Pre	7.00*	1.85	6.17	1.64
Awareness	Post	8.33*	1.46	7.25	2.01

* Pretest postest means significantly different at $p < .05$.

Note. Low scores on the forced-choice attitude measure can be interpreted as indicating either negative attitudes toward Japanese or positive attitudes toward one's own group.

Note. High scores on group preference indicate own-group bias.